Some killers deserve to die – the case of Steven Hayes

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Steven Hayes

There has long been a tendency in the debate over the death penalty to focus on side issues or even non-issues. The most common such non-issue is what if an innocent person is executed? In support of this contention, people who should know better but

apparently don't, have gone to extraordinary lengths to exculpate the most guilty of killers. For nigh on three decades they have literally queued up to lie on behalf of Mumia Abu-Jamal. In the case of the recently executed Troy Davis, their lies even duped a former President of the United States. Linda Carty is currenty sitting on death row in Texas while many people here believe there is a reasonable doubt over her guilt, or even that she is a totally innocent woman who was framed by wicked drug dealers then failed by a useless lawyer.

The simplest and best response to this particular non-argument is that the death penalty should be reserved for the worst of the worst, which does not include these three miscreates, not by a long way. Mumia Abu-Jamal was a small-minded obsessive political non-activist who blew away a police officer in a moment of madness. Well, a minute or two of madness. Troy Davis was a punk who pistol whipped a homeless man then shot a man dead in front of numerous witnesses in a parking lot. Did he and does Abu-Jamal deserve to die? If one adheres to an eye for an eye, yes, but as somebody once pointed out, that would leave us all blind. Does Linda Carty deserve to die for her crime? Again, there are those who think so, but like "innocent" Mumia and "martyred" Troy, she is small potatoes. Which brings us to Steven Hayes.

The infamy of this depraved apology for a human being led to his receiving a big splash in today's *Daily Mail*, not the first time he has been so honoured. His conviction last year for a home invasion and triple murder was also covered by our national press.

In July 2007, Hayes and his accomplice, the somewhat younger Joshua Komisarjevsky, invaded the Cheshire, Connecticut home of medical specialist William Petit, battered him, tied him up in the basement, tied up his wife and daughters, and set about robbing the house, which was apparently the original plan, but first greed got the better of Hayes, then bloodlust. Jennifer Hawke-Petit was forced under duress to accompany Hayes to the bank where as well as withdrawing $15,000 she managed to alert the teller that something was wrong, although sadly this was too little too late.

On returning to her home she was raped and strangled by Hayes and her body set on fire. Her daughters, 17 year old Haley and 11 year old Michaela, were doused with gasoline, and heads covered with pillowcases, were left to die from smoke inhalation.

A CCTV still of Jennifer Hawke-Petit released by the American legal authorities. Shortly after this was taken, the nurse, and wife of Dr William Petit, would be raped and strangled, and her body set on fire.

Hayes was sentenced to death last December; his co-defendant was convicted earlier this month, and is due to be sentenced tomorrow. It is notable that even Clive Stafford Smith's Reprieve organisation is muted about Hayes, although of Komisarjevsky Reprieve says "the case for death penalty is far from clear Joshua was cooperative with the police, explaining that he never intended anyone to die, and there is no proof as to his involvement in the arson." On top of that he has a famous daddy. Sigh.

While the poor punctuation may be excusable, a lawyer of Stafford Smith's standing cannot be excused for his apparent ignorance of joint enterprise.

Whatever the jury decides tomorrow, no one should lose any sleep over the execution of Steven Hayes, although it may not happen for several years due to the nature of the American legal system.

Although he has been convicted only of three murders, Hayes has confessed to or rather boasted, of seventeen more dating back to 1982.

There has apparently been no comment by the legal authorities on the veracity of these claims, although they are surely investigating quietly behind the scenes, but even if all these claims turn out to be demonstrably false, and Hayes is trying deviously to work his ticket to an asylum, his crimes, proven beyond all reasonable doubt or any doubt at all, make him a prime candidate for a punishment which, if used sparingly, should attract no serious criticism at all.

[The above op-ed was first published October 24, 2011. One very minor correction has been implicated. Links archived by WebCite have been omitted because at the time of writing – April 14, 2022 – this service appears to be dormant if not defunct. The photograph of Steven Hayes is a slightly different edit from the one used originally. The subsequent abolition of the death penalty in Connecticut means neither Hayes nor his odious co-defendant will now be executed. One minor point, Linda Carty may be small potatoes but she is also among the worst of the worst.]